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As Children's Memorial plans move, Near West jockey for position

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Photo courtesy of Children's Memorial Hospital
Will Children's Memorial move to the Medical District?

Children's Memorial Hospital has been a fixture in Lincoln Park for 123 years. Now, with plans to move, supporters of potential new sites are making the case for their locations.

The renowned pediatrics facility, located near landlocked Lincoln and Fullerton avenues, needs more space. Children's spokeswoman, Kathleen Ellis, said site options have been narrowed down. A final decision is expected early next year.

The hospital currently has 250 beds, with mostly two patients per room. Expansion plans call for 275 private rooms, limited to one patient, by 2012. And by 2017, the number of rooms would increase to 343.

Two sites in Chicago—the Illinois Medical District on the city's near West Side and a location in Streeterville—have emerged as relocation possibilities for Children's Memorial.

The Medical District already houses Rush University Medical Center, Stroger Hospital, and the University of Illinois Medical Center at Chicago. The Streeterville site is near Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, 303 E. Chicago Ave., which serves as the teaching and research arm for Children's.

John Chandler, president of the University Village Association and vice president of St. Ignatius, says the Medical District site is more appropriate than the one in Streeterville.

"There are few sites with the criteria they are looking for in Streeterville," Chandler said, adding that the hospital will need "parking, an existing infrastructure, or accessibility. It's not just a city clientele."

Advantages for the West Side, he said, are that the Medical District area spans about 560 acres and has

a special zoning and tax status. This keeps the land costs low, and would enable Children's to operate virtually tax free, he said.

In addition, supporters of the West Side say the area has direct access to major expressways and public transportation. Also, supporters argue that the land costs would be less expensive.

Some West Side community leaders and health advocates are surprised, and optimistic about the news of Children's setting their sights at their neighborhood.

"I never associated Children's with the West Side. It's a different population," said Dr. Cynthia Boyd, director of University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative who also is a community health director in the Medical District.

"But if it serves all the residents of the West Side the way it did in the North [Side], then that's a very good thing."

Supporting the Streeterville site is Jeffrey Miller, chief operating officer of the Feinberg School of Medicine. "Geography really does matter," he said. "Some of the best pediatric hospitals are co-located with their affiliated medical schools."

According to Miller, the top 20 academic children's enterprises, as measured by funding for research, are on the same campus with their teaching hospitals.

Miller fears a move farther away—to the Medical District or to some proposed sites farther west of the current location—may strain the strong relationship Children's already has with Northwestern's medical school. And Miller acknowledges that land costs would be cheaper. But, he added, "hospitals in the medical district don't share beds."

Condo Developers Cross St. Clair Street With 316-Unit Play

By Mark Ruda

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CHICAGO-Sutherland Pearsall Development gets a plan commission endorsement for a 38-story, 316-unit building at 535 St. Clair St., where unit prices will average \$500 per sf.